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THE IDRC EVALUATION SYSTEM

25 November 1986





INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH CENTRE

CENTRE DE RECHERCHES POUR LE DÉVELOPPEMENT INTERNATIONAL

MEMORANDUM/NOTE DE SERVICE

TO/À: Management Committee

DATE: 25 Nov., 1986

FROM/DE: Doug Daniels

SUBJECT/OBJET: **THE IDRC EVALUATION SYSTEM**

There will be a discussion on the Centre's evaluation activities during the 18 December Management Committee meeting. There has not been any major discussions in Management Committee on this issue before. I thought it would be useful, therefore, to circulate some background material in Annex II. I am also enclosing a memo discussed with the President's Committee at the 12 September meeting (Annex I) in which they expressed agreement with our suggestions on how to incorporate evaluation more explicitly in the Centre's planning process.

Most evaluation programs do not contribute to corporate memory. I believe the OPEIS database developed in the last year will resolve part of this problem and I will include a presentation on OPEIS during the meeting.

In addition to the information included here, there are a number of additional documents available from OPE that cover particular aspects of the system. These are listed on the last page of the attachment.



INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH CENTRE

CENTRE DE RECHERCHES POUR LE DÉVELOPPEMENT INTERNATIONAL

MEMORANDUM/NOTE DE SERVICE

TO/À: The President's Committee

DATE: 12 Sept. 1986
(modified)

FROM/DE: Doug Daniels

SUBJECT/OBJET: IMPROVING THE EVALUATION SYSTEM
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1. The IDRC evaluation system has been evolving since 1978. Some of the component parts, such as OPEIS, and aspects of the approach, such as the extensive use of Third World evaluators, have attracted considerable interest in other agencies. In order to have a functioning system worthy of the standards of excellence sought by IDRC, further refinements to and coordination of procedures are required.
2. It is timely to re-examine the system and the extent of evaluation activities. As noted during the Policy and Management Seminar:

"Although not considered in detail during the Seminar, there was agreement that the evaluation of programs and projects supported by the Centre and of its internal operations is critical to IDRC's accountability and essential to its management process." [PPR VIII, p.13]

Several factors lend weight to this general endorsement. The number of project activities has grown exponentially since 1970, more than doubling in each 5-year period : 272 in the first 5 years; 675 from 1976 to 1980; and 1,473 up to 1985. IDRC has now moved out of its early experimental laissez-faire phase into corporate maturity. The accumulation of experience should now enable the Centre to create innovative programs with higher probabilities of greater effectiveness. Increased public awareness and budgetary restraint combine to put further pressure on aid agencies to deliver effective interventions and to demonstrate that they have done so. It is not feasible to hold up the complexity of the task as an answer to basic questions, such as those posed by the Standing Committee on External Affairs, eg.:

- do we ask the poor themselves what they want and need?
- should it (aid) be targetted more carefully at providing help to the poorest people? How?
- are Canadian aid projects appreciably better - or more likely to succeed - than they were a decade ago?

Finally, there is the question of public access. Apart from the legal obligation, there is a growing necessity to share evaluation material both with the general public and especially with the Canadian research community whose partnership in Third World research we wish to foster. L. Gertler* talks of ".... a certain distemper related to the general lack of accessible evaluative material on the Canadian international development effort of the last quarter century. It has not been the prevailing style and the omission is increasingly felt."

3. The President's Committee reviewed the system in October 1985, with particular respect to clarifying the responsibilities of OPE. The discussion was based on a comprehensive paper prepared by OPE comprising (a) a memo outlining two options for co-ordinating and conducting evaluations; (b) a full description of the present system; and (c) an analysis of major issues. The President's Committee asked OPE to review the system and to suggest mechanisms to ensure coordination and use of evaluations, and to encourage the development of more formal divisional evaluation plans. Other priorities on the P.C. agenda, and the Policy and Management Seminar have taken precedence. However, OPE has been working with all the main program divisions on specific evaluations, and with HSD in particular on the development of a divisional evaluation system. We have also had preliminary discussions with IS on the formulation of an evaluation plan. Further development of the Evaluation Framework for the Cooperative Programs Division, which lays out the division's mission, objectives and key evaluation issues, is being deferred until the In-depth Division Review is completed.
4. This memorandum proposes some specific steps for the improvement of the present system. In summary they are as follows:-

* L. Gertler, "Research for Third World Development, Revisited", mimeo, August 1986, p.33.

Evaluation Plans : broad divisional statements of intention as to which projects and programs are to be evaluated, focussing on the IDDR, as the occasion when the results will be used, and future evaluation plans formulated.

: annual statements in PWB of evaluation plans.

Information and Coordination : summary evaluation assessments for projects and programs to be sent to cluster V.P. and OPE prior to implementation.

: on completion, copies of the evaluation report sent to cluster V.P. and OPE (for OPEIS entry.)

: periodic sessions of MC organized by OPE to review evaluation results and issues across divisions.

Procedures : OPE to make copies of the Evaluation Procedures Manual more widely available to Centre staff and to encourage greater use during the conduct of studies.

If the President's Committee agrees with these recommendations, it is suggested that the subject is fully discussed by Management Committee at an early date. The broader context of the recommended steps, and a more detailed explanation of them is given below.

5. The evaluation system can be discussed in terms of three component categories, each corresponding to a different level of detail:

I Project Completion Reports (PCR's) - "micro", or individual project level.

II In-depth Evaluation Studies - ranging from single project, to groups of projects, programs, and "stripe" issues (across divisions).

III In-depth Division Reviews (IDDR's) - "macro", or divisional (retrospective section) level, every 4-5 years.

6. **I Project Completion Reports (PCR's)**

Since the PCR component is subject to review during 1986/87, it is premature to propose policy prescriptions. On the basis of previous reviews and current knowledge, it can be said that the quality, timeliness and content of PCR's are variable, and the degree of utilization within divisions is fair to weak. Before conducting the review, it will be necessary to carry out an evaluation assessment to identify the purpose of the study, the issues to be addressed and the information required. This will entail consultation with the President's Committee and division directors.

7. **II In-depth Evaluations**

It is appropriate at this point to recognize the wide range of activities that can be and are described by the term "evaluation". There is a spectrum of formality, from discussions at staff meetings to full research projects; there is a spectrum of content, from assessment of institutional capability, through peer review, to measurement of research priorities; and there is a spectrum of timing, from ex ante appraisal of a project, through monitoring, to follow-up research to determine development effects. All are geared to providing useful information for a specific purpose and to fit resource and other constraints. Broadly speaking, the kind of evaluation referred to in this memo, and particularly in this part of it, is sufficiently formal to produce a written report, either by Centre staff or by external personnel; is retrospective in nature, i.e. it examines past activities (which may be of on-going projects); and it attempts a broad assessment of the value of those activities relative to some objective(s). Given that many studies contain more than one kind of information, including the kind of evaluation information just described, and therefore should be included in the Centre's corporate memory of evaluations, a more rigorous definition is not offered at this stage.

8. PCR's and IDDR's differ in one important way from **in-depth evaluation studies** in that they are "set" activities : all projects should have a PCR and all divisions are subject to an in-depth review in a regular cycle. In-depth evaluation studies however are conducted according to need and OPE's practice has been to respond to the requirements of clients in carrying them out. Given that the range of possible studies in this category is greater than the resources available to conduct them, issues such as choice criteria, responsibility, co-ordination and priority-rating of clients have to be considered, as well as use and quality. For the purposes of discussion, it may be useful to divide this category into three groups : (i) project evaluations, (ii) program evaluations, and (iii) "stripe" or policy

evaluations. The latter would include country and institutional studies in which activities supported by more than one division are involved.

9. (i) Project Evaluations

The President's Committee indicated at its meeting in October 1985 that OPE should concentrate more on program (ii) and largely on policy (iii) evaluations on major issues. This implies that divisions are primarily responsible for the choice and conduct of project and program evaluations.

The large number of projects per program officer, the modest average dollar size of project, and the mandatory requirement of a PCR suggest that in-depth studies of individual projects should be the exception rather than the rule. At present, judgements about the need for individual project evaluations are often made separately by divisions, by OPE and the R.D.'s. The main issues raised by this practice are:

- lack of corporate information about evaluations that have been done or are intended;
- quality control;
- missed opportunities to share the lessons of experience on a broader front;
- reduced ability to provide comprehensive public access to the results of evaluation research.

A number of measures could be taken to address these issues.

- (1) **Prior to committing resources** to any individual project evaluation, a brief (one-page) **evaluation assessment** should be done and sent to OPE and the cluster V.P. The assessment should state the purpose of the evaluation, the clients, the issues that need to be addressed to meet the purpose, the information that is to be collected, the methodological options, the resource implications and possible consultants (if any). The VP and OPE would then have the opportunity to make suggestions, and OPE would be able to fulfil its role as the single source of information about the evaluation activities in the Centre and to decide which studies would provide information which could be entered into OPEIS.

- (2) For the implementation of the studies, divisions would be encouraged to use the Evaluation Procedures Manual recently developed by OPE as a guide.
- (3) On completion of the evaluation the division would send a copy of the final report to the V.P. and to OPE. The results could then be put into OPEIS.

10. (ii) Program Evaluations

In this context, "program" may refer to the set of activities under the responsibility of an associate director (the education or water supply and sanitation "programs"); or a smaller set supported under one division (mollusc culture, remote sensing, grain milling).

The same concerns about project evaluations also apply to program evaluations. Additional issues are :

- lack of integration with in-depth division reviews (IDDR's);
- lack of external input.

The increasingly systematic approach to the IDDR's provides an opportunity to address these issues. It is suggested that divisions should draw up evaluation plans, the focal point of which should be the IDDR. During the IDDR process, members of the Board, the President's Committee or the Division Director may identify strategic planning issues which cannot be resolved during the conduct of the IDDR. They often require in-depth study, including evaluation of particular programs or sets of projects. Hence over the long-term, one IDDR can help to set the agenda for a division's evaluation plans for the next 4 to 5 years and thereby feed valuable planning information into the next IDDR. Evaluation plans need not be confined to program evaluations and could also include studies of individual and groups of projects, or of activities that cut across all projects. The plans and their implementation should be reviewed by the President's Committee* and coordinated by OPE. In this way the effectiveness of the IDDR's with respect to their main objective "... to acquire an in-depth evaluation of the work of the Division, covering ... the last several years ..." (PC 85/99), will be increased.

* As the work on Centre themes progresses, the co-ordination of evaluation plans will become more important to ensure that the same theme issue is addressed by several divisions.

Requirements for the conduct of individual studies would be the same as those for project evaluations outlined above: evaluation assessments sent to the cluster VP and OPE; use of the Evaluation Procedures Manual. To increase the extent to which the lessons of experience are shared across the Centre, it may be considered desirable to periodically review the general results of program evaluations and stripe studies in Management Committee.

11. (iii) Policy ("stripe") Studies

Since the advent of the President's Committee, this body has become the primary motivator and client for such studies, a trend that has markedly increased their utilization in policy formulation. The implementation of some or all of the above steps would lead to competition for the resources available for major policy studies, at least until such time as the system becomes more streamlined and routine. These issues can be resolved during the discussion of OPE's workplan for the annual PWB. OPE will continue to devote less resources to individual project evaluations, more to program studies, divisional evaluation plans and IDDR's and to responding to requests from the President's Committee for specific policy-related studies.

One "stripe" or cross-divisional issue that OPE continues to use as a major selection criterion is utilization of project output, particularly for beneficial development effect. This emphasis was endorsed during the Policy and Management Seminar which concluded that "... in carefully selected instances, the Centre must attempt to assess the outcomes and the impact of the products of IDRC-supported programs and projects." (PPR VIII, p.14). This activity often involves re-examining projects some years after completion, something which the divisions find difficult to do because of the rapid growth of project development and monitoring. OPE has worked closely with the regional offices in this area and intends to use the 60 cases identified for, but not used in, the "With Our Own Hands" publication as the basis for further work, consulting with the divisions on evolving methodology and testing different approaches.

12. III In-depth Division Reviews (IDDR's)

The IDDR component is being refined and improved and it is intended to bring revised guidelines for divisional statements to the President's Committee at same meeting as this document. It is therefore not intended to explore this component in detail here. As indicated above, the retrospective component of IDDR's could be considerably strengthened by linking it more deliberately to the formulation of evaluation plans and the scope and conduct of in-depth evaluation studies.

THE PRESENT EVALUATION SYSTEM IN IDRC

1. Evaluation: Purpose

The term 'evaluation' is used to designate an assessment of the value and outcomes of activities near to, at or after their completion. It is 'ex-post' evaluation, and does not include project appraisal prior to commencement nor assessment of research resources, needs and priorities. When it refers to Centre programs, it signifies a retrospective assessment of the value of an ongoing program with respect to its completed or present activities.

The aim of evaluation is to feed back information into planning and management to facilitate and improve decision-making. The purposes of evaluation in the Centre are:

- . accountability
- . corporate memory
- . future decision-making.

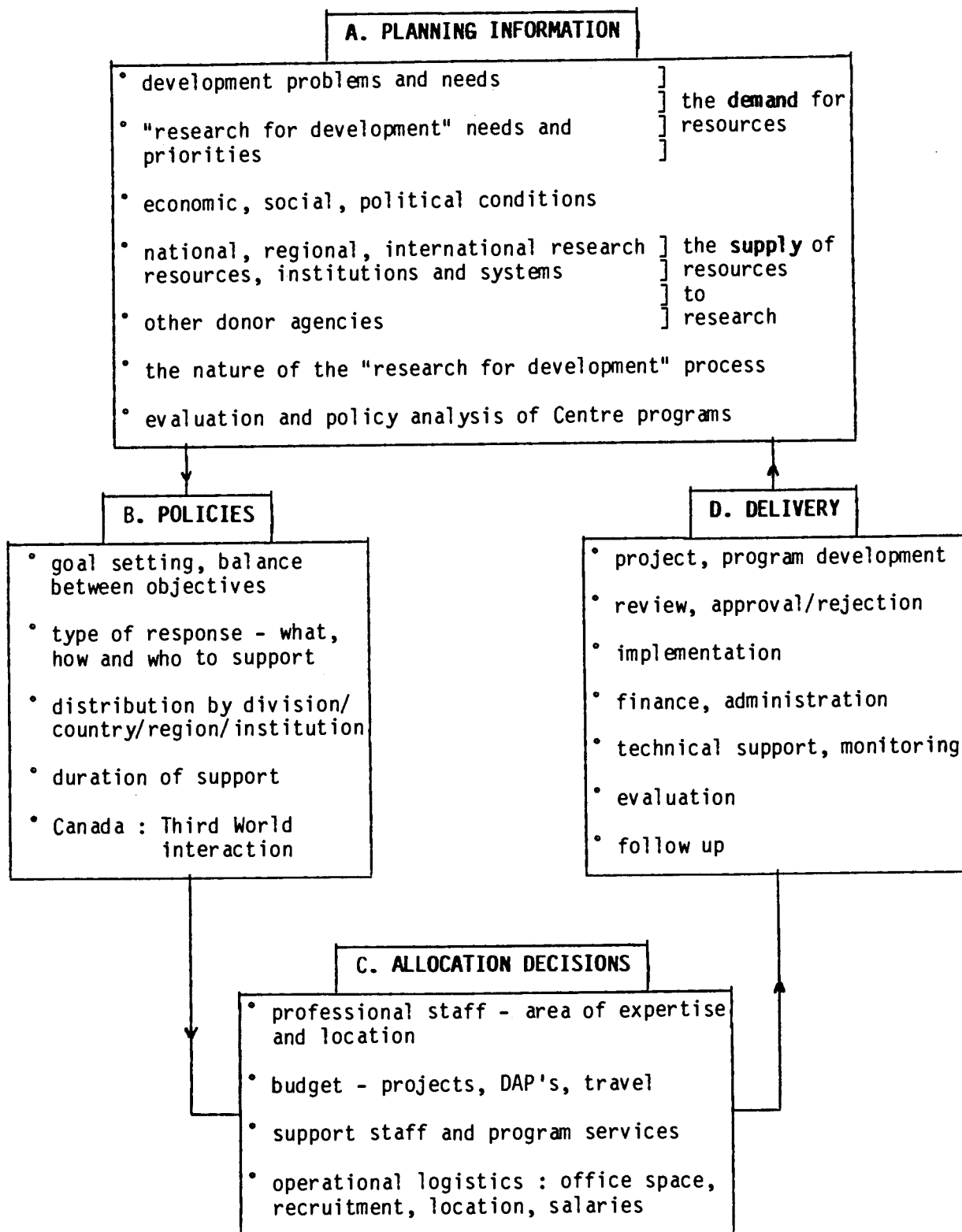
Figure 1 on page 2 shows IDRC's Planning and Evaluation Cycle, illustrating how evaluation information from IDRC's projects and programs fits into the Centre's overall decision-making framework.

2. Responsibility for the Centre's Evaluation System

Evaluation did not start in the Centre with the creation of an Office of Planning and Evaluation in 1978. Program divisions had already undertaken evaluation exercises to provide information on outcomes and to learn lessons from the activities which they had funded. However by 1978 the need for a more formal, Centre-wide approach was felt.

A policy document, "The Introduction of a Planning and Evaluation System in IDRC" (Office of the Vice-President, Planning, September 1979) described how the Office of the Vice-President, Planning, had been given the mandate for designing the structure and methodology for project and program evaluation, and proposed the major elements of an evaluation system (Project Completion Reports, In-depth evaluations of projects and program areas; and policy analysis undertaken on issues of multi-divisional and Centre-wide interest - see Section 4 below). The document states: "it is anticipated that these evaluations and policy studies, conducted and organized at different levels within the Centre, will feed into the three-year planning process, enabling the President and Management Committee to make recommendations to the Board on priorities to be assigned to program areas for funding..."

Figure 1



The OVPP, subsequently the Office of Planning and Evaluation (OPE), assumed major responsibility for coordinating evaluations of Centre activities, and for undertaking most in-depth and policy-oriented evaluations. This responsibility has not been exclusive. Program divisions have continued to fund in-depth project evaluation. In addition, Program divisions have the major responsibility for preparation of Project Completion Reports, and for organizing and undertaking the In-Depth Divisional Reviews which have grown in importance and extent since the introduction of the formal system. OPE provides guidelines for these two levels of activity review.

OPE has liaised closely with program divisions and regional offices in discharging its responsibility for evaluations and policy studies. The Office's responsibility for coordination and management of the regional offices ended in 1983, but close links have been maintained and OPE is represented at the now regular regional office staff meetings. Close relationships have been maintained with the program divisions with whom OPE has cooperated on a growing number of evaluation activities.

N.B. Discussion from here concentrates on OPE's objectives, guiding principles and procedures in evaluation, though they apply to varying degrees to the work undertaken by program divisions directly.

3. OPE's objectives in evaluation

Consistent with the objectives and philosophy of the Centre, the objectives of OPE are:

- a. to promote, through active involvement or co-ordination and advice as appropriate, the planning of resource allocations to development research, both within the Centre and in developing countries.
- b. to promote and co-ordinate evaluation work conducted or sponsored by the program divisions; to conduct studies itself; and to encourage the development of developing countries' capability in evaluation work. Thus, through its involvement in evaluation, the OPE aims to serve the Centre and also to contribute to the development research process of the developing countries.

4. Operating principles for evaluations: these are dealt with at greater length in papers prepared by OPE staff, (see Annex 1).

- (i) Evaluations are oriented to meeting user needs and therefore utilization. The evaluation assessment (see Procedures, below) focusses on clarification of the users, the purpose for which they require the evaluation and the information they need to know;
- (ii) The level of resources allocated to ex-post evaluation is kept modest. More Centre resources are devoted to ex-ante than to ex-post evaluation, and a significant proportion of ex-post evaluation is done through 'informal' mechanisms, such as workshops, project visits and staff meetings;
- (iii) Evaluations are non-confrontational ; for the most part, OPE does not propose, it responds to requests from various levels of management.
- (iv) Perspective is more important than "objectivity". Since, by definition, values cannot be eliminated from evaluation, it is more profitable to make quite explicit the point of view being sought and to conduct the study accordingly.
- (v) The conduct of evaluation studies by developing country researchers contributes, through learning by doing, to building indigenous research evaluation capacity . Also, since the Third World view of the value of a research activity is often deliberately sought by the Centre, (see "Perspective" above) the involvement of developing country nationals in evaluation studies becomes doubly important.
- (vi) The process of conducting an evaluation is as important as the product.

5. Criteria and Method

In the Evaluation Plan Addendum in the 1984/85 Multi-Year operational plan (MYOP), the Centre reported on the development of a framework for the selection and focus of in-depth studies. This has subsequently been developed further and included in the Evaluation Procedures. It is felt to be over-simplistic to allow a single criterion (e.g. all projects over x dollars; or every tenth project) to decide selection. The framework has been used to reconcile the conflicting demands on resources of the multi-user, multi-purpose environment within which the Centre operates. The acceptance and usefulness of evaluation studies is optimized by using three groups of criteria to select and focus studies:

- (1) users or clients;
- (2) purposes or uses to which the results will be put;
- (3) what information will be required to satisfy (1) and (2).

These are combined with a number of general indicators to assist in final selections for evaluation studies, e.g.:

- . past investment;
- . commitment and future intentions;
- . divisional balance;
- . regional balance;
- . cost, ease of assessment, availability of data.

OPE has now undertaken a range of studies selected through a combination of a responsive and experimental approach:-

- . evaluation of a set of Centre activities in one country (Ethiopia);
- . evaluation of a set of activities in one program area (Mollusculture projects);
- . input into a review of the Education program;
- . area specific learned societies;
- . CODESRIA;
- . OECD Liaison Bulletin.

The last three activities all illustrate that OPE continues to be involved in single-project evaluation, though greater priority is now being given to activities which have broader policy implications for the Centre (Small-grants review; Evaluation of a group of AFNS projects at Sokoine Agriculture University, Tanzania). Equally there are examples of in-depth project evaluations being funded by program divisions independent of OPE.

The heterogeneity of users and their needs, of purposes to be met by evaluations, and of types of activity - ranging from information centres to cassava breeding - has obliged a highly selective approach to methodology, essentially tailoring it to suit each particular case. Certainly OPE has not espoused any particular methodologies, believing that there is no universally "right" answer in this respect. Nevertheless, with a considerable number of evaluations now

completed, it is felt that discussion is now worthwhile on methodology on the basis of the Centre's evaluation experience.

6. Procedures

OPE has produced a document on Evaluation procedures which will be applied to studies it undertakes and which is appropriate for general use in the Centre, (see 'Evaluation Procedures' - 1984, OPE, Ottawa). This document lays out the various stages of an evaluation and illustrates how time-consuming and demanding each study can be. The stages which are identified are: file search, evaluation assessment study and decision whether to undertake the evaluation; preparation of terms of reference; recruitment of consultant(s) and briefing; monitoring of consultants work; review and comments on the Evaluation Report; follow-up and dissemination of the report; Evaluation Completion Report; inclusion of the Evaluation in Corporate memory. Most stages require some consultation with the user.

7. Use and Dissemination of Evaluation Reports

OPE has worked with the Electronic Data Processing unit on the development of a data base for Evaluation reports, (OPEIS). This will permit a search on types of evaluation, evaluation objectives, major areas covered by the studies, evaluation summaries and conclusions, evaluation methodology, programming and policy implications. The data base will be available to the Centre through IMIS. The development of this system is important since at present no mechanism exists for the discussion of evaluation results across the Centre. Results of individual studies and their follow-up are discussed with the user who was identified at the outset of each exercise, and who had an input to the purpose and format. However there is no broader forum for discussing results and lessons. Some organizations have an Evaluation Committee or combine this function in the mechanism for approving or vetting new projects.

The OAG Report on the Centre suggested that the Centre should develop procedures for summarizing assessments of key evaluation elements on project completion reports for inclusion in its management information systems to facilitate analysis and retrieval of data. The data base being developed for in-depth evaluations could eventually also accommodate PCR's; however the preparation of data from PCR's would add a considerable burden to the writing of these reports.

The procedures for the use of individual evaluation reports are dealt with in sections 5 & 6 of the Evaluation Procedures.

8. Building Evaluation Capacity in Developing Countries

OPE has tried to use consultants from developing countries whenever possible and appropriate. It has felt that a normal corollary of supporting capacity building in research, which is a major focus of the Centre's activities, was to make a similar contribution to strengthening that part of research management which falls in its area of responsibility.

9. The Centre's Planning of Future Evaluation Activities

As was noted under section 5, PCR's and IDDR's are mandatory parts of formal and regular cycles. The cycle of In-Depth Divisional Reviews requires considerable lead-time if adequate allowance is to be made for planning and executing evaluation activities in such a manner that results and lessons can feed into IDDR's.

The OAG report on the Centre has suggested a more formal and longer planning time for evaluation activities. The IDDR's constitute a sound basis upon which to formulate more concrete evaluation plans. Beyond that, the responsive, user-oriented approach developed by OPE results in more effective use of evaluation resources, and further consultation with users - in particular, Division Directors and the President's Committee - about evaluation needs, should lead to clearer, more comprehensive planning of Centre evaluations.

OPE
November 1986

Supporting Documents

1. Planning System in IDRC October 1984
2. IDDR's - Guidelines for Divisional Review December 1983
Memo on IDDR Procedures Dec.84/Jan.85
3. PCR Notes October 1982
4. Evaluation Procedures Manual November 1984
5. OPE Conference Papers

J.D.M. Hardie, Sing C. Chew, and W.D. Daniels "The Role of Evaluation in Planning", Canadian Evaluation Society, May 1984.

Doug Daniels and Sing Chew "Evaluating National Research Systems and Programs in the Third World" - Some Comments", April 1985.

Sing C. Chew and W. Douglas Daniels, "Evaluations in the Third World National Research Systems : Some Trends and Operational Experiences." CES, Toronto, October 1985.

J.D.M. Hardie "Note on the Application of Cost-Benefit Analysis in Evaluating Impact from Research" IFAD, Rome, June 1985.

T. Smutylo "The Evaluation of Externally-Funded Research and Development Projects in Developing Countries" CES, Banff, April 1986.
6. OPEIS Manual